

Speak of the characteristics which, either humorously & reproachfully, we are in the habit of ascribing to the people of different sections of our own country.

Nationality is not necessarily, strictly speaking, an aggregate of individualities, any further than words are concerned. A people, to be sure, may be peculiarly industrious, distinguished in that respect from their neighbors, in the same manner that an individual is, but usually, when we reckon industry among the characteristics of a people, we refer not to any peculiarity in that industry, but to its prevalence. When, on the other hand, we say of an individual, that he is a shrewd man, no peculiarity is implied; so that, unless we even an epithet for the occasion, we are fain to call him a peculiarly shrewd man.

This may teach us how ^{far} the knowledge of a nation's characteristics should influence our judgment of individuals. In the first place, we are to consider that the individual before us may be one of the few, who, constituting but a small item of the national character, were not taken into the account, and, in the second place, that if of the majority, not a single individual peculiar-

ity can be embraced or implied. Add to this the fact, that such characteristics may generally be traced to the journal of some traveller, who has taken a hasty and partial survey of but one section of a country, and are often the mere echo of previous prejudices, and we shall be able to judge how slight the probability ^{is} that the so-called characteristics of a people have any foundation in truth.

It is not a little curious to observe how man, the boasted Lord of creation, is the slave of a name—a mere sound. Cassius was not the first to note this. The distinction of classes in a college affords an instance of it. If a multitude be collected from all quarters, and of every condition, and a common name be given them, a powerful sympathy will immediately spring up, which in time will generate a community of interests. In this light, man is properly enough called a gregarious animal, but it appears to me the common epithet is as often the connecting link, as it is the result of such a union.

Rome had never been mistress of the world had not the distinction of ^{allies} been merged in the title of Roman citizens. They were Romans who conquered the world;

so many Latins, Apulians, and Campanians, had they stood, in other respects, in precisely the same relative

situations, would sooner have gone to war with each other. How much mischief have those magical words, North, South, East, and West, caused. Could we rest satisfied with one mighty, all-embracing West, leaving the other three cardinal points to the old world, methinks we should not have cause for so much apprehension about the preservation of the Union. When, in addition to these natural distinctions, descriptive and characteristic epithets are applied, by their own countrymen, to the people of different sections of the country, though in a careless and bantering manner, the patriot may well tremble for the Union.

A sound and impartial judgment is less to be esteemed for the excellent good consequences it leads to, than prejudice is to be feared for the incalculable evil it engenders. It is easier to convince a man's reason, than to ~~change~~ regulate his feelings. There are certain principles implanted in us, which, independently of the will, teach us the consistency and inconsistency of things, when viewed in certain relations. By operating upon these principles, through the medium of certain definite propositions, corresponding invariable results, in the mind of each one, of necessity follow. That these conclusions as invariably of-

fect the conduct, I do not pretend. The feel-
ings, on the other hand, are not at the mercy of
any such definite law, which regulates and disposes
them. The eloquence which, at one time, ^{touches with a} ~~causes~~
^{matter's hand} to vibrate ~~all~~ the chords of human sympathy, and
raises almost to a pitch of phrensy the rapt and
excited multitude, at another, perhaps, falls
powerless and ineffectual, or excites those very
feelings it was its object to soothe and allay.

There is the same difficulty in dissipating
those prejudices already formed; the sober truth
may be recognised, the false judgment admitted,
but a crowd of associations has so confounded
error with the most palpable truths, that the
evil can be but partially, if ever, eradicated. What
once floated harmlessly upon the surface, in
time commingles with, and becomes a part of the
mighty element, which at first barely afforded it
a resting place.

Thoreau Feb. 17th

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